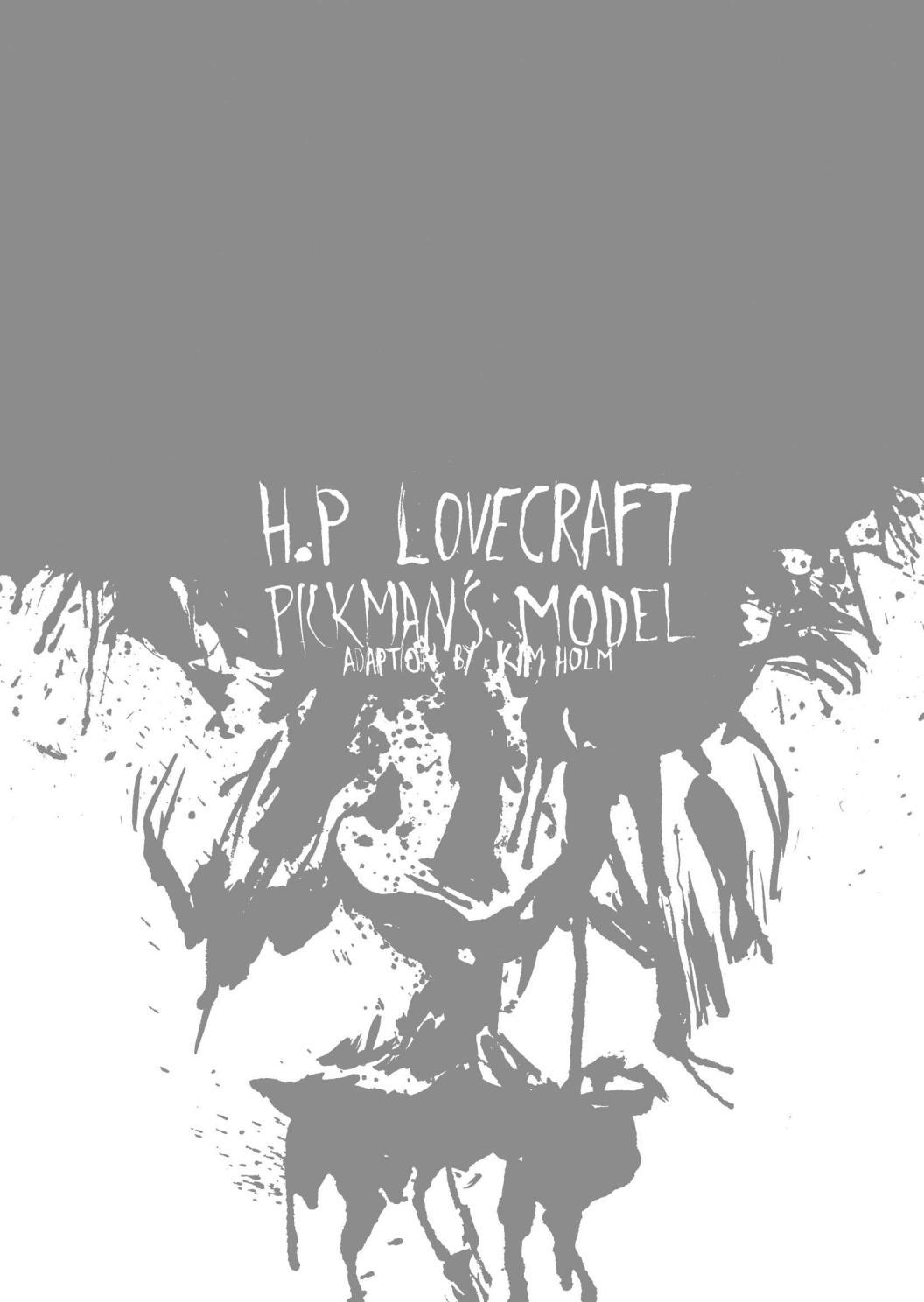


H.P. LOVECRAFT PICKMAN'S MODEL

ADAPTED BY KIM HOLM



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PICKMAN'S MODEL

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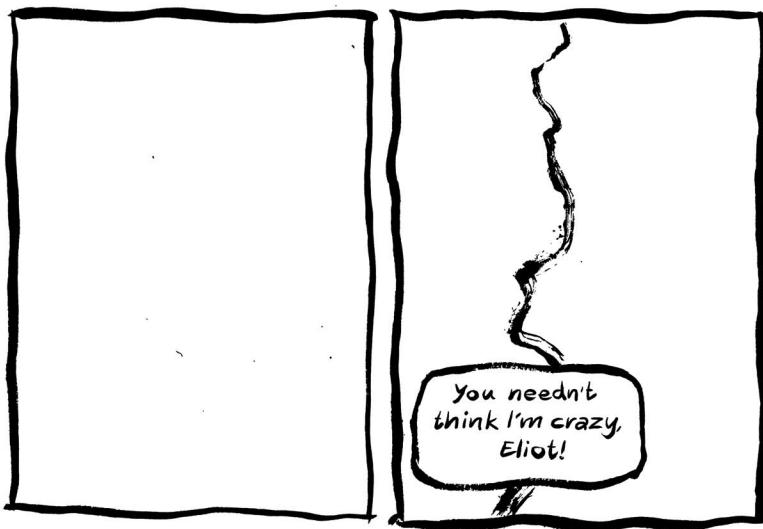
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Dedicated to Esteban.

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Boston, 1926



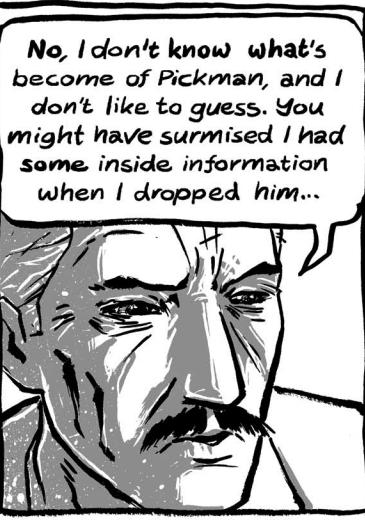


If I don't like
that damned subway, it's
my own business...

...and we got
here more quickly
anyhow in the taxi.

We'd have had
to walk up the hill from
Park Street if we'd taken
the car.





No, I don't know what's become of Pickman, and I don't like to guess. You might have surmised I had some inside information when I dropped him...

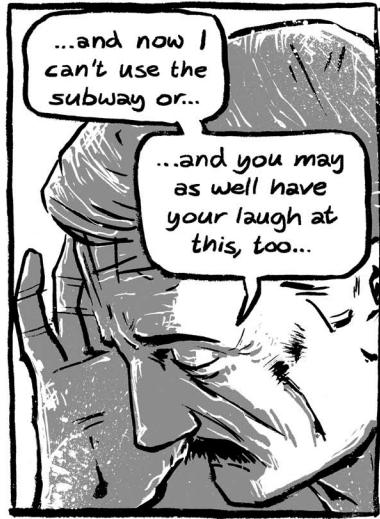


...and that's why I don't want to think where he's gone.



Yes, I do know, or am afraid I know, why he maintained the old North End place he hired under the name of Peters.

I'm coming to that.



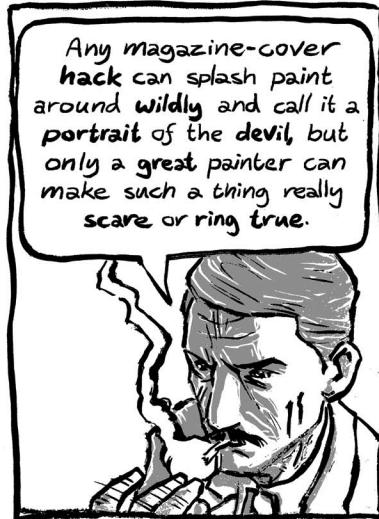
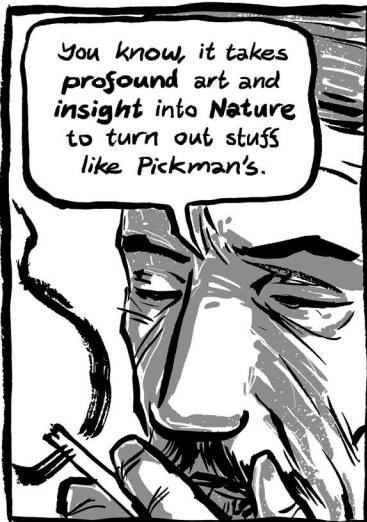


I should think you'd have known I didn't drop Pickman for the same silly reasons that fussy old women like Dr. Reid or Joe Minot or Rosworthy did.

Morbid art doesn't shock me, and Boston never had a greater painter than Richard Upton Pickman.

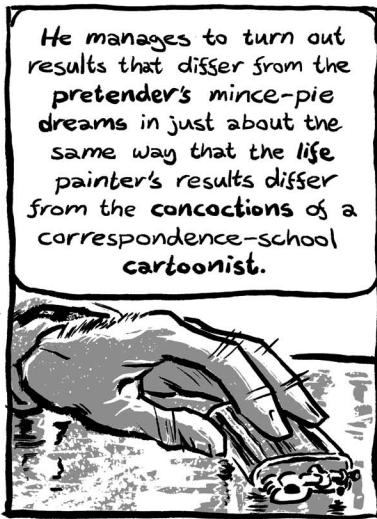
I said it at first and I say it still, and I never swerved an inch, either, when he showed that 'Ghoul Feeding'.

That was when Minot cut him off.















I remember your asking Pickman yourself once, the year before you went away, where the hell he got such ideas and visions.



Wasn't that a nasty laugh he gave you?



It was partly because of that laugh that Reid dropped him.

He said Pickman repelled him more and more every day, and almost frightened him towards the last...

...that his features and expression were slowly developing in a way he didn't like...

...in a way that wasn't human.







Before long I was pretty nearly a devotee, and would listen for hours like a schoolboy to art theories and philosophic speculations...



...wild enough to qualify him for the Danvers asylum.



My hero-worship, coupled with the fact that people generally were commencing to have less and less to do with him, made him get very confidential with me...



...and one evening he hinted that if I were fairly close-mouthed and none too squeamish, he might show me...





...something
rather unusual...

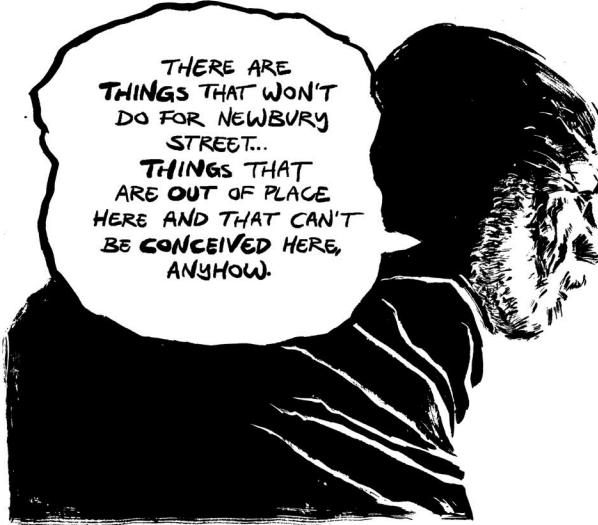


...something
a bit stronger...

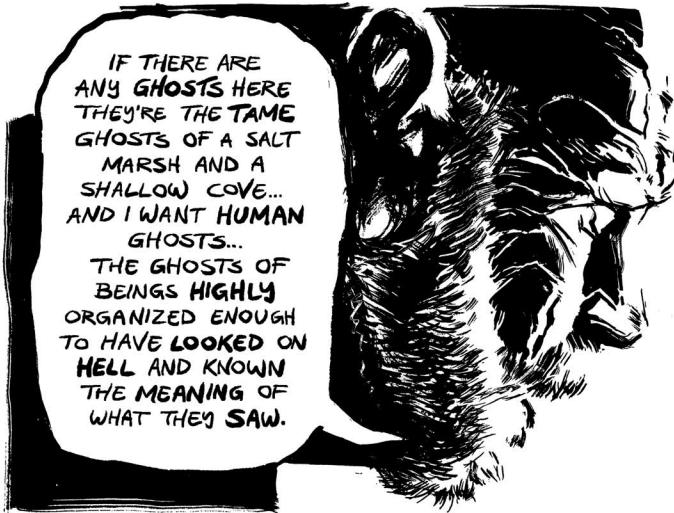
...than anything he had
in the house.

YOU KNOW...

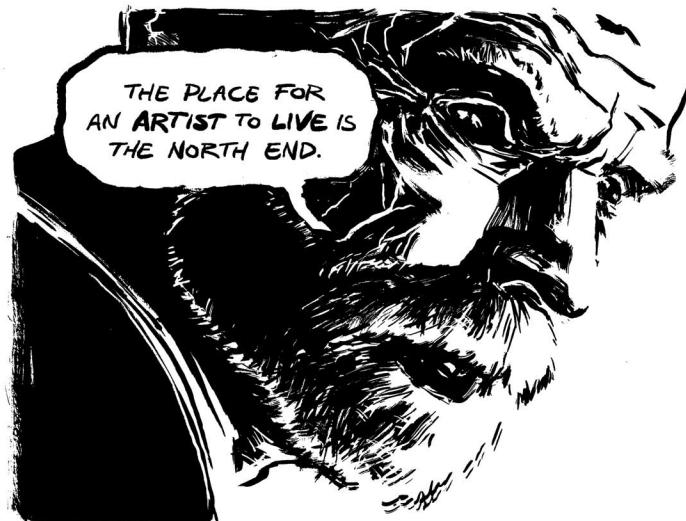




THERE ARE
THINGS THAT WON'T
DO FOR NEWBURY
STREET...
THINGS THAT
ARE OUT OF PLACE
HERE AND THAT CAN'T
BE CONCEIVED HERE,
ANYHOW.



IF THERE ARE
ANY GHOSTS HERE
THEY'RE THE TAME
GHOSTS OF A SALT
MARSH AND A
SHALLOW COVE...
AND I WANT HUMAN
GHOSTS...
THE GHOSTS OF
BEINGS HIGHLY
ORGANIZED ENOUGH
TO HAVE LOOKED ON
HELL AND KNOWN
THE MEANING OF
WHAT THEY SAW.



THE PLACE FOR
AN ARTIST TO LIVE IS
THE NORTH END.



GOD, MAN!
DON'T YOU REALIZE
THAT PLACES LIKE THAT
WEREN'T MERELY MADE,
BUT ACTUALLY GREW?



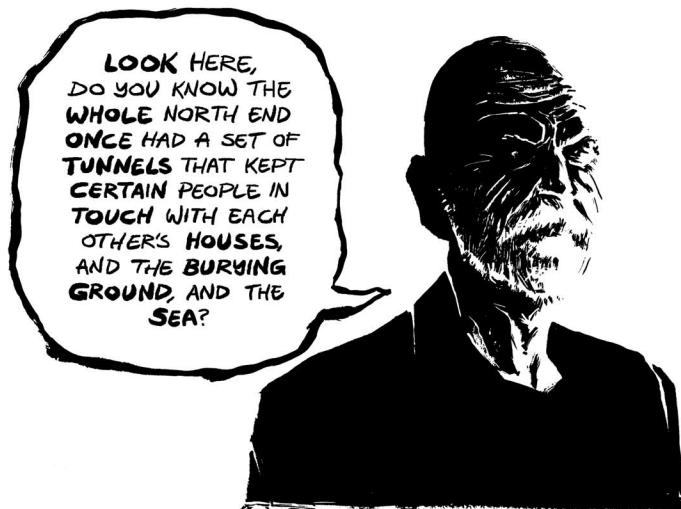
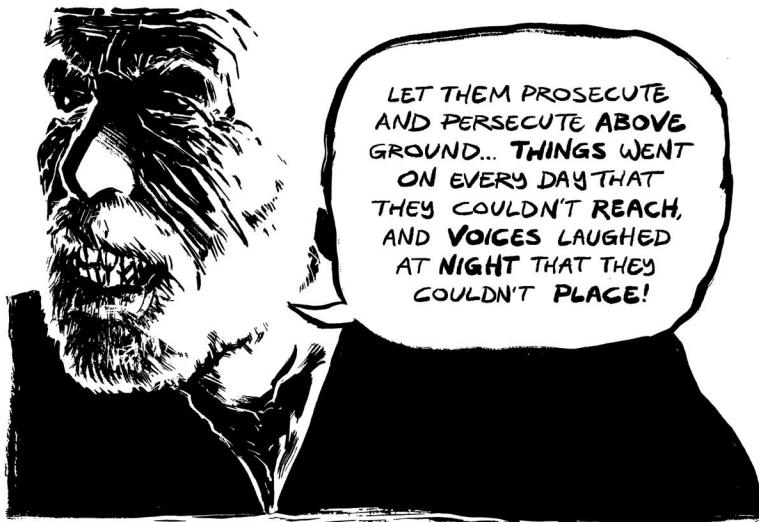
GENERATION AFTER
GENERATION LIVED AND
FELT AND DIED THERE,
AND IN DAYS WHEN
PEOPLE WEREN'T AFRAID
TO LIVE AND FEEL AND
DIE!

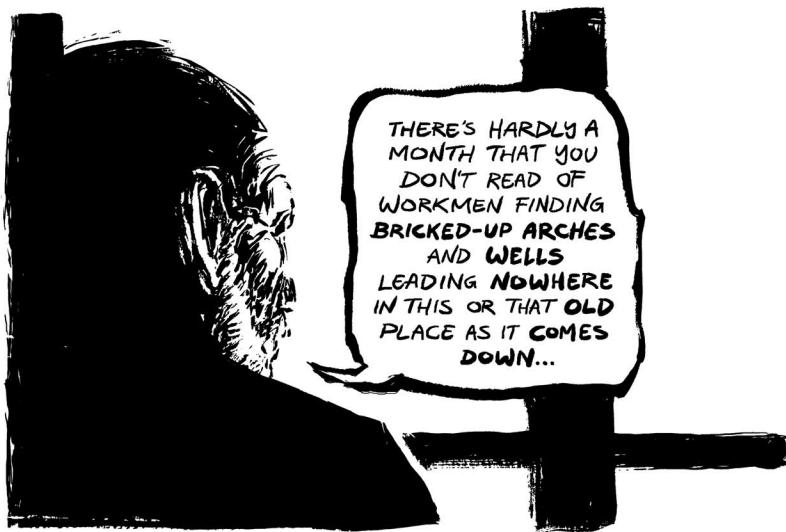
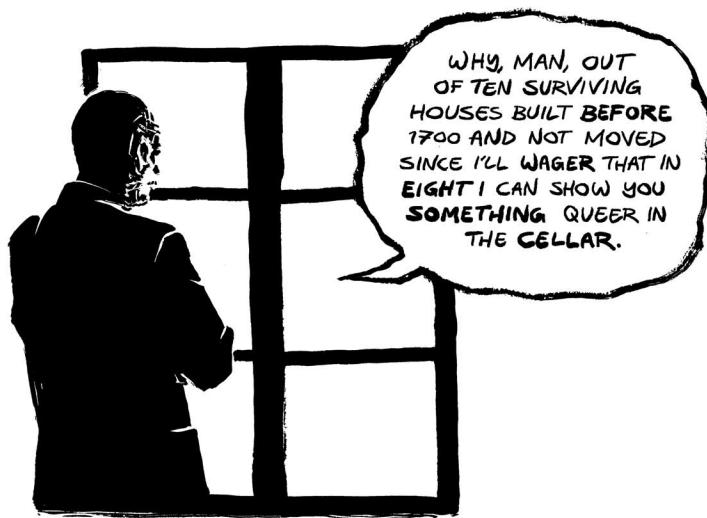
I CAN
SHOW YOU HOUSES
THAT HAVE STOOD TWO
CENTURIES AND A HALF
AND MORE...
HOUSES THAT HAVE
WITNESSED WHAT WOULD
MAKE A MODERN HOUSE
CRUMBLE INTO POWDER.
WHAT DO MODERNS
KNOW OF LIFE AND
THE FORCES BEHIND
IT?

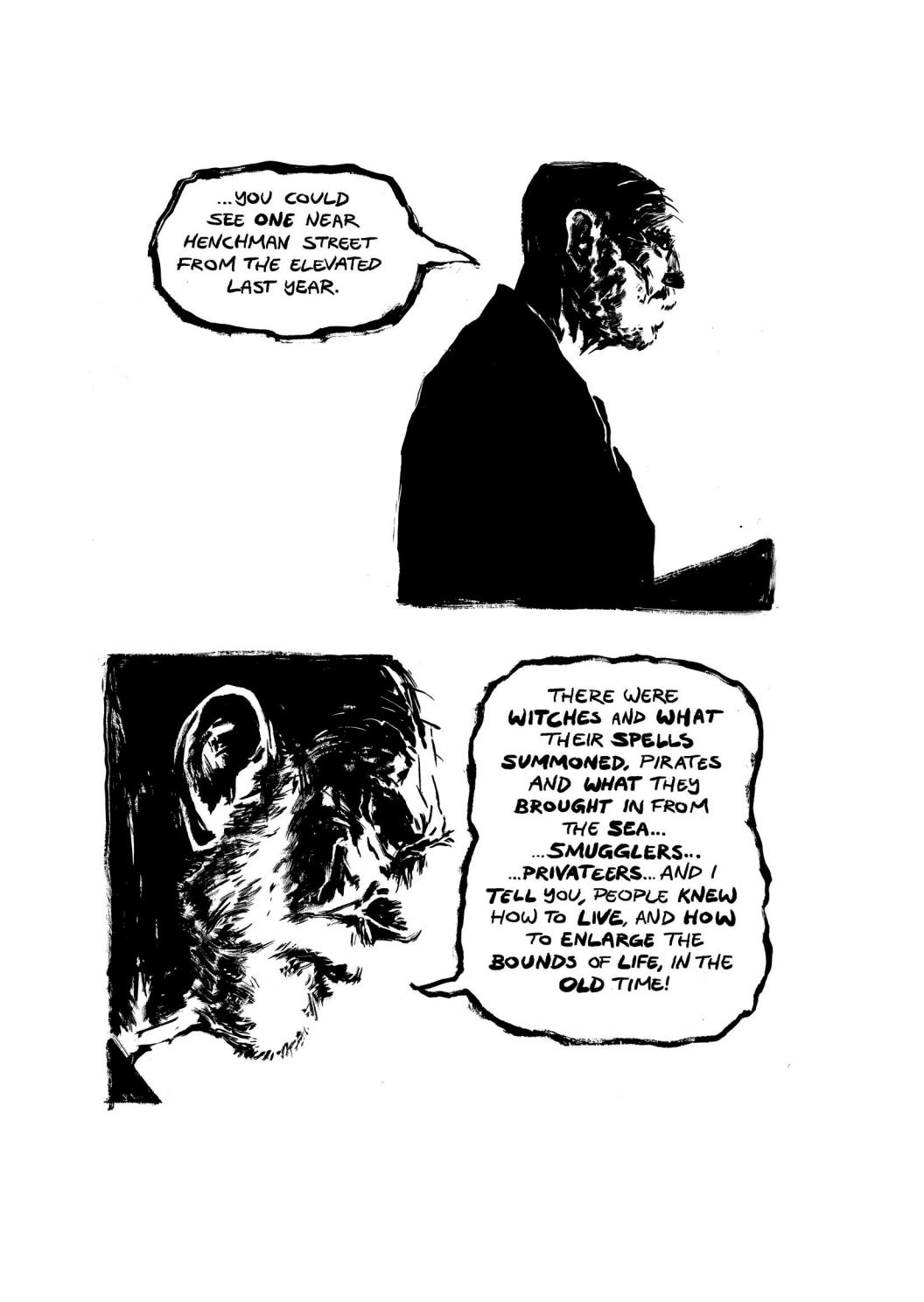


YOU CALL THE
SALEM WITCHCRAFT A
DELUSION, BUT I'LL WAGER
MY FOUR-TIMES-GREAT-
GRANDMOTHER COULD
HAVE TOLD YOU THINGS.

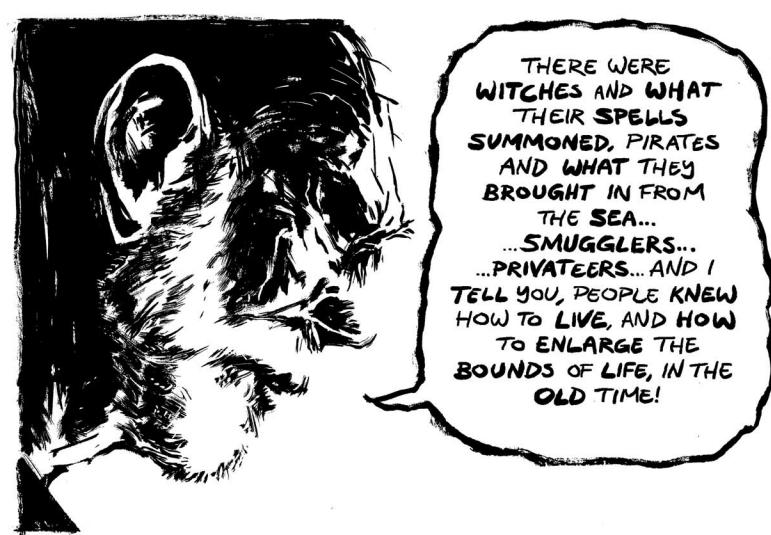
THEY HANGED HER ON
GALLows HILL, WITH
COTTON MATHER LOOKING
SANCTIMONIOUSLY ON.







...YOU COULD
SEE ONE NEAR
HENCHMAN STREET
FROM THE ELEVATED
LAST YEAR.



THERE WERE
WITCHES AND WHAT
THEIR SPELLS
SUMMONED, PIRATES
AND WHAT THEY
BROUGHT IN FROM
THE SEA...
...SMUGGLERS...
...PRIVATEERS... AND I
TELL YOU, PEOPLE KNEW
HOW TO LIVE, AND HOW
TO ENLARGE THE
BOUNDS OF LIFE, IN THE
OLD TIME!



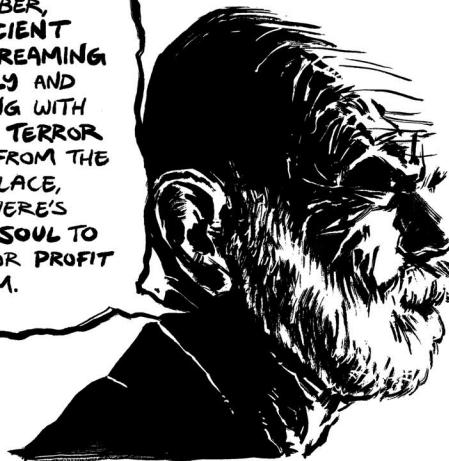
AND TO THINK OF
TODAY IN CONTRAST...
THE ONLY SAVING GRACE
OF THE PRESENT IS THAT
IT'S TOO DAMNED STUPID
TO QUESTION THE PAST
VERY CLOSELY.
WHAT DO MAPS AND
RECORDS AND GUIDE-
BOOKS REALLY TELL OF
THE NORTH END?
BAH!

I CAN
LEAD YOU TO THIRTY
OR FORTY ALLEYS AND
NETWORKS OF ALLEYS
NORTH OF PRINCE STREET
THAT AREN'T SUSPECTED BY
TEN LIVING BEINGS OUTSIDE
OF THE FOREIGNERS THAT
SWARM THEM.



AND WHAT DO
THOSE DAGUES KNOW
OF THEIR MEANING?

NO, THURBER,
THESE ANCIENT
PLACES ARE DREAMING
GORGEOUSLY AND
OVER-FLOWING WITH
WONDER AND TERROR
AND ESCAPES FROM THE
COMMONPLACE,
AND YET THERE'S
NOT A LIVING SOUL TO
UNDERSTAND OR PROFIT
BY THEM.





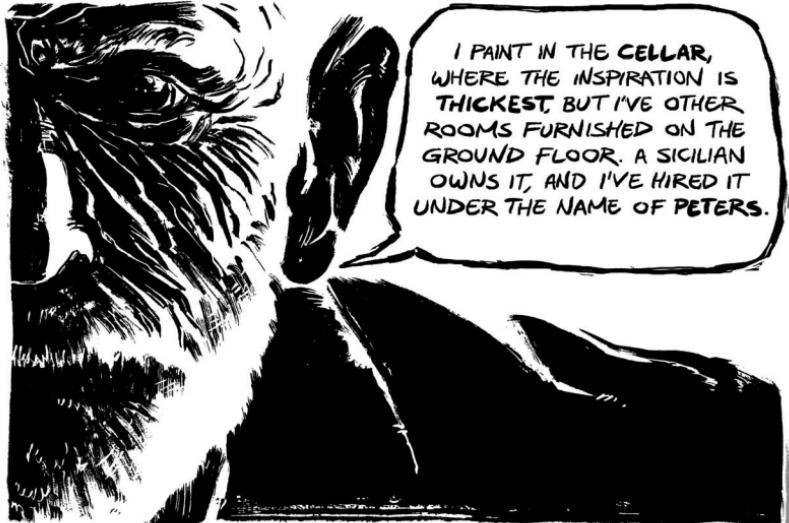
OR
RATHER, THERE'S
ONLY ONE LIVING
SOUL...
FOR I HAVEN'T BEEN
DIGGING AROUND IN
THE PAST FOR
NOTHING!

SEE HERE, YOU'RE
INTERESTED IN THIS
SORT OF THING. WHAT
IF I TOLD YOU THAT I'VE
GOT ANOTHER STUDIO
UP THERE, WHERE I CAN
CATCH THE NIGHT-SPIRIT
OF ANTIQUE HORROR
AND PAINT THINGS THAT
I COULDN'T EVEN THINK
OF IN NEWBURY
STREET?





I TOOK IT
BECAUSE OF THE QUEER OLD
BRICK WELL IN THE CELLAR.
ONE OF THE SORT I TOLD YOU
ABOUT.



I PAINT IN THE CELLAR,
WHERE THE INSPIRATION IS
THICKEST, BUT I'VE OTHER
ROOMS FURNISHED ON THE
GROUND FLOOR. A SICILIAN
OWNS IT, AND I'VE HIRED IT
UNDER THE NAME OF PETERS.



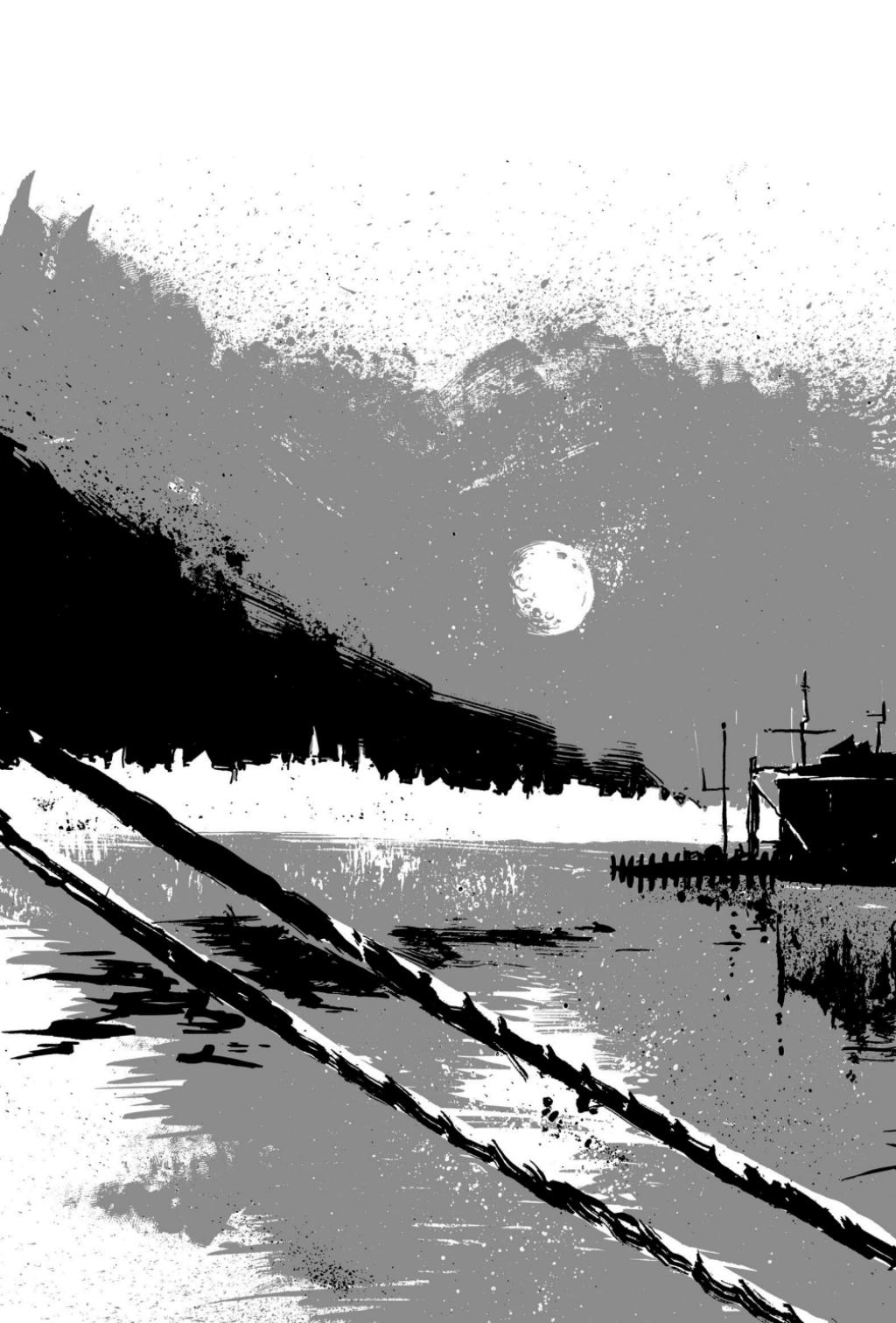
...there wasn't much for me to do after that harangue but to keep myself from running instead of walking for the first vacant cab we could sight.







We changed to the
elevated at the South Station...

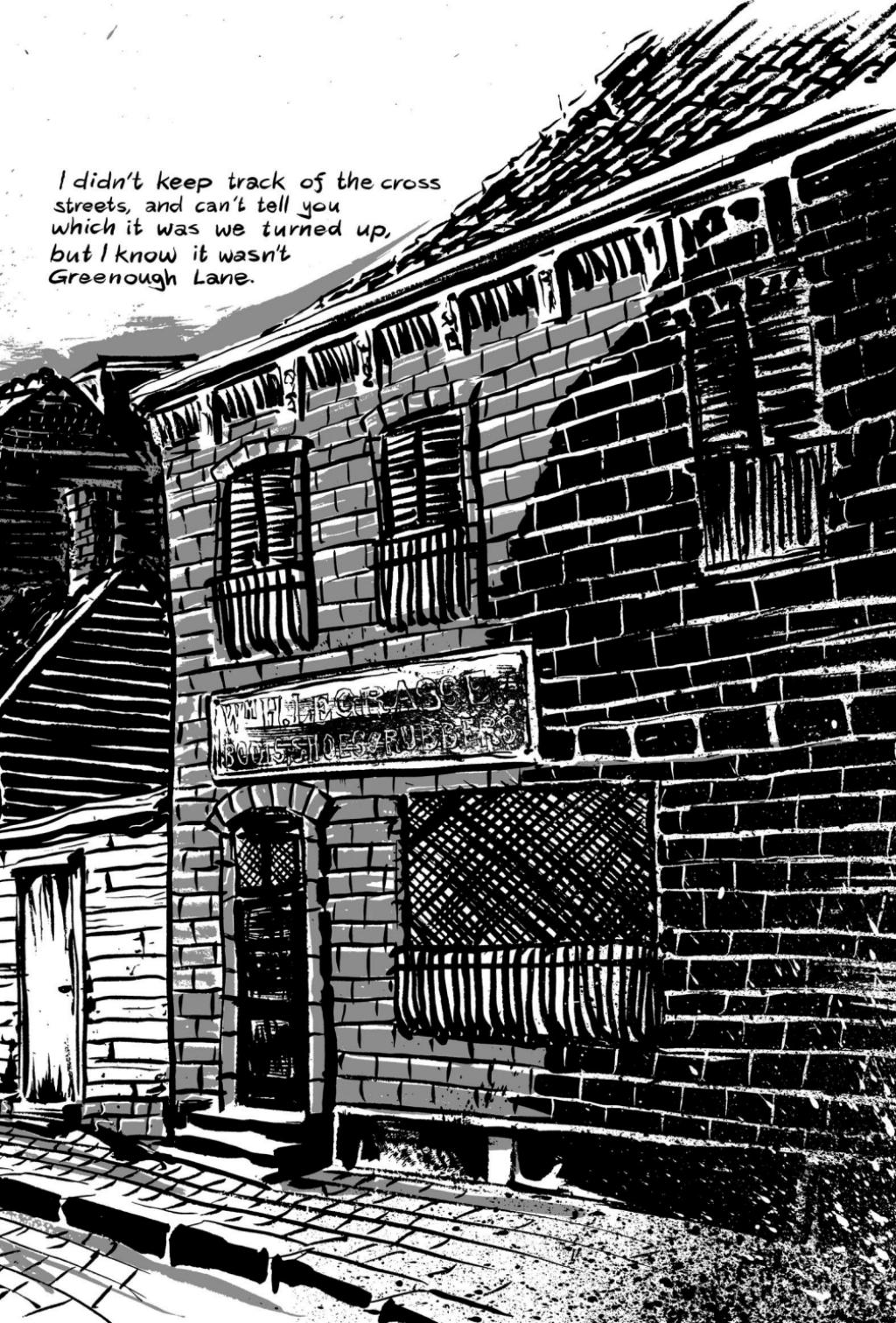


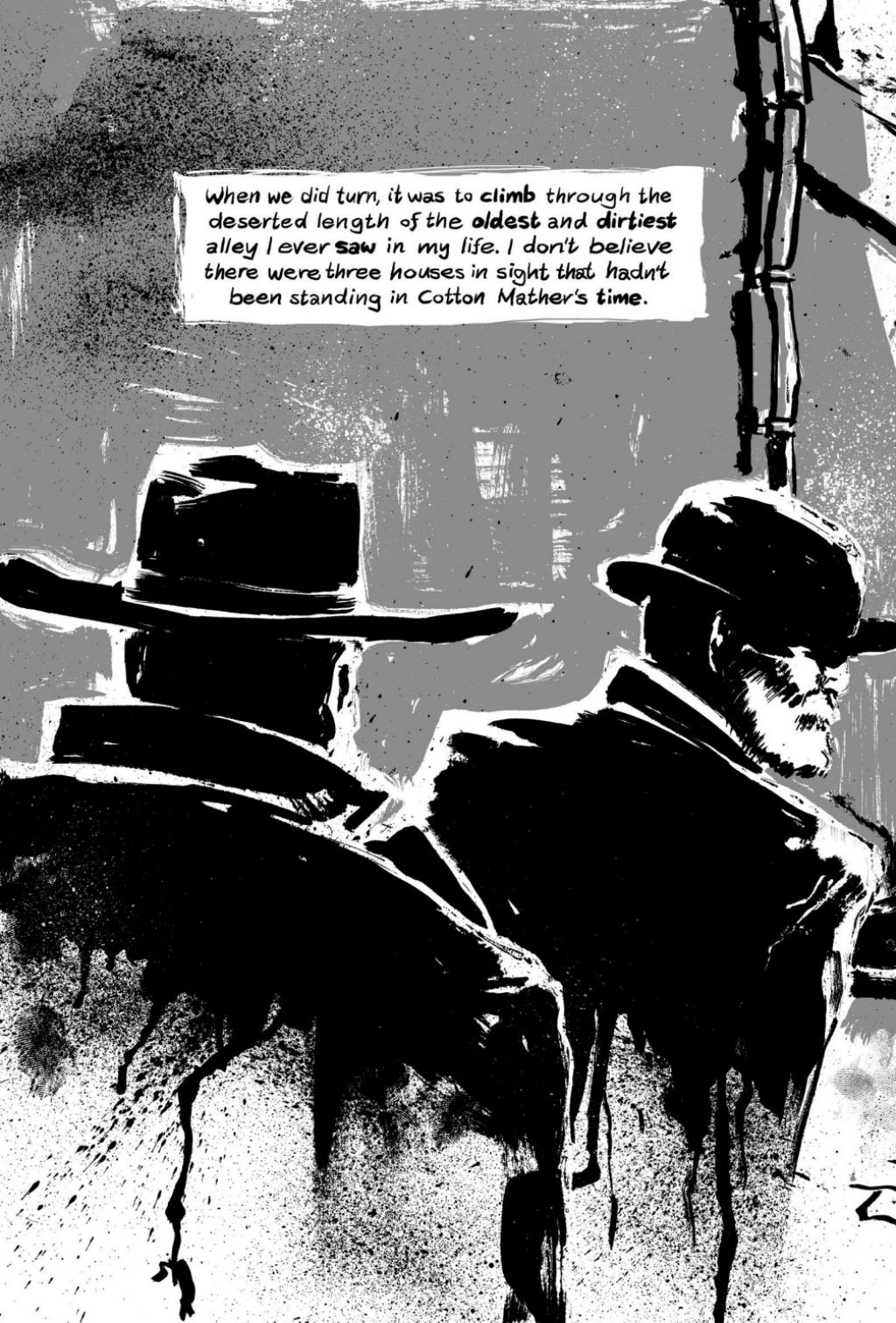
...and at about twelve o'clock had climbed down the steps at Battery Street and struck along the old waterfront past Constitution Wharf.



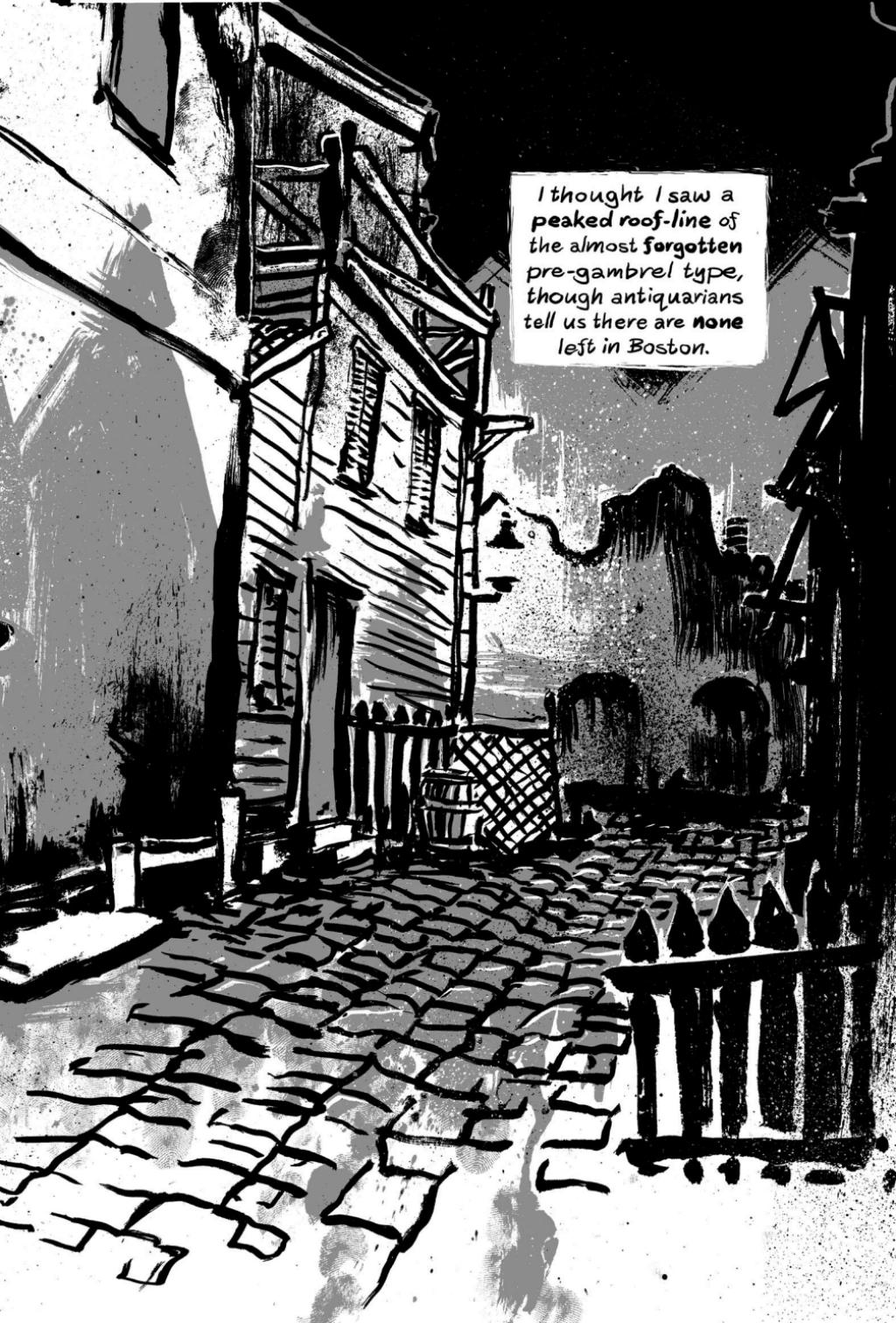


I didn't keep track of the cross
streets, and can't tell you
which it was we turned up,
but I know it wasn't
Greenough Lane.





When we did turn, it was to climb through the deserted length of the oldest and dirtiest alley I ever saw in my life. I don't believe there were three houses in sight that hadn't been standing in Cotton Mather's time.



I thought I saw a
peaked roof-line of
the almost forgotten
pre-gambrel type,
though antiquarians
tell us there are none
left in Boston.



From that alley, which had a dim light, we turned to the left into an equally silent and still narrower alley with no light at all; and in a minute made what I think was an obtuse-angled bend toward the right in the dark.





Now, Eliot,
I'm what the man in the
street would call fairly
hard-boiled...



...but I'll confess that
what I saw on the walls
of that room gave me
a bad turn.



They were his
pictures, you know...

...the ones he couldn't
paint or even show in
Newbury Street...

...and he was right
when he said he had 'let
himself go.'



Here... have
another drink...
I need one
anyhow!





There's no use in my trying to tell you what they were like, because the awful, the blasphemous horror and the unbelievable loathsomeness and moral foetor came from simple touches quite beyond the power of words to classify.

The backgrounds were mostly old churchyards, deep woods, cliffs by the sea, brick tunnels, ancient panelled rooms, or simple vaults of masonry.



Copp's Hill Burying Ground, which could not be many blocks away from this very house, was a favourite scene.



The madness and monstrosity lay in the figures in the foreground... For Pickman's morbid art was pre-eminently one of demoniac portraiture. These figures were seldom completely human, but often approached humanity in varying degree. Most of the bodies, while roughly bipedal, had a forward slumping, and a vaguely canine cast.





One canvas showed a ring of them baying about a hanged witch on Gallows Hill, whose dead face held a close kinship to theirs.



But don't get the idea that it was all this hideous business of theme and setting which struck me faint.

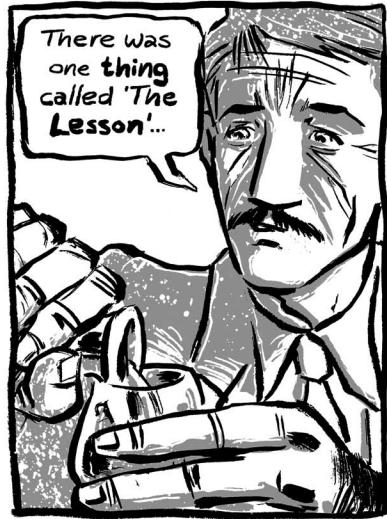


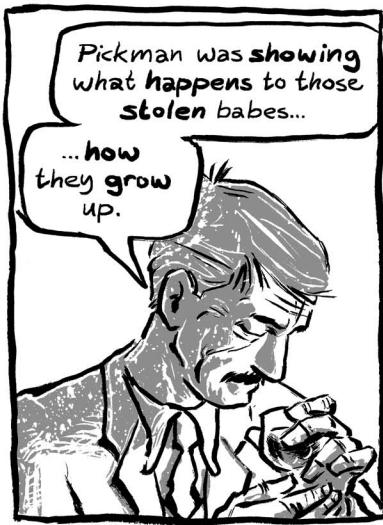
I'm not a three-year-old kid, and I'd seen much like this before.



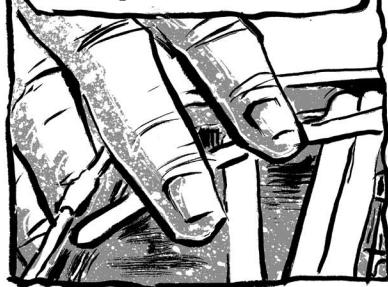
It was the faces, Eliot...







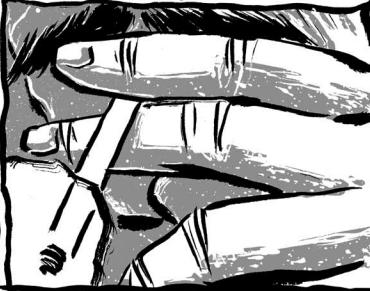
He was, in all his gradations of morbidity between the frankly non-human and the degradedly human, establishing a sardonic linkage and evolution.



The dog-things were developed from mortals!



And no sooner had I wondered what he made of their own young as left with mankind in the form of changelings, than my eye caught a picture embodying that very thought.



It was that of an ancient Puritan interior with the **family** sitting about while the father read from the *Scriptures*.



Every face but **one** showed nobility and reverence, but that **one** reflected the mockery of the pit.



It was that of a **young** man in **years**, and no doubt **belonged** to a supposed **son** of that pious father, but in **essence** it was the kin of the **unclean** things.



It was their **changeling**...





...and in a spirit of supreme irony Pickman had given the features a very perceptible resemblance to his own.

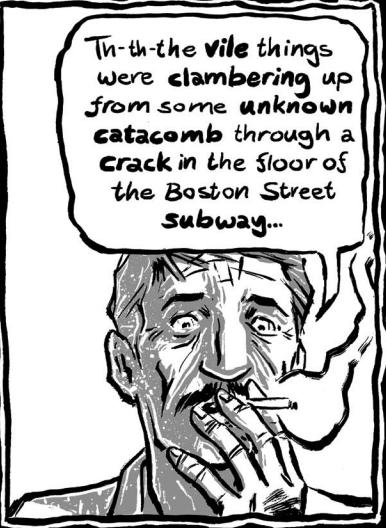
WOULD YOU LIKE
TO SEE MY MORE
MODERN STUDIES?







God, how
that man
could paint!



Th-th-the **vile** things
were clambering up
from some unknown
catacomb through a
crack in the floor of
the Boston Street
subway...



...dancing on Capp's
Hill among the tombs
with the background of
today...



...there were any
number of cellar views,
with **monsters** creeping in
through **holes** and **rifts** in
the masonry...

...Beacon Hill,
with ant-like armies
of the mephitic monsters
squeezing themselves
through burrows that
honeycombed the
ground...



...And another
conception somehow
shocked me more than
all the rest...



...a scene in an unknown
Vault, where scores of the
beasts crowded about one
who had a well-known
Boston guidebook and was
evidently reading aloud.



All were pointing to a
certain passage, and
every face seemed so
distorted with epileptic
laughter that I almost
thought I heard the
fiendish echoes.



The title of the picture was, "Holmes, Lowell and Longfellow Lie Buried in Mount Auburn."



Nothing was blurred, distorted, conventionalized; outlines were sharp and lifelike and details were almost painfully defined.



And the faces!





FOLLOW
ME...

It was not any mere
artist's interpretation
that we saw...

...it was
pandemonium itself,
crystal clear in stark
objectivity.

The man was
not a fantaisiste or
romanticist at all...

...he did
not even try to give us
the churning, prismatic
ephemera of dreams...



...but coldly and
sardonically reflected some
stable,
mechanistic, and well-
established horror-world
which
he saw fully,
brilliantly, squarely, and
unfalteringly.



THIS IS THE
KIND OF WELL I
WAS TALKING
ABOUT.



God knows what that world can have been,
or where he ever glimpsed the blasphemous
shapes that loped and trotted and crawled through
it; but whatever the baffling source of his images,
one thing was plain.



Pickman was
in every sense...

...in conception
and in execution...

...a thorough, painstaking,
and almost scientific realist.



DEUCE KNOWS
WHERE IT LEADS
EH?



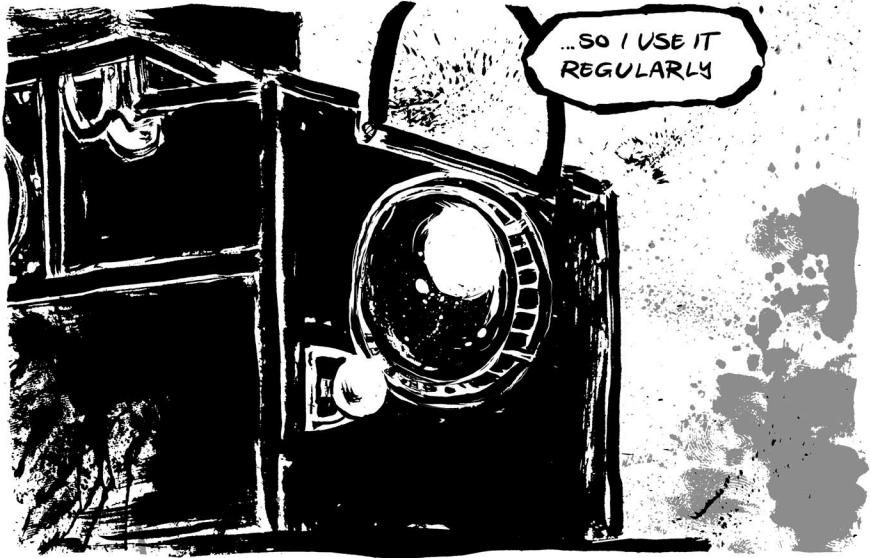


COME NOW,
ENTER MY STUDIO.











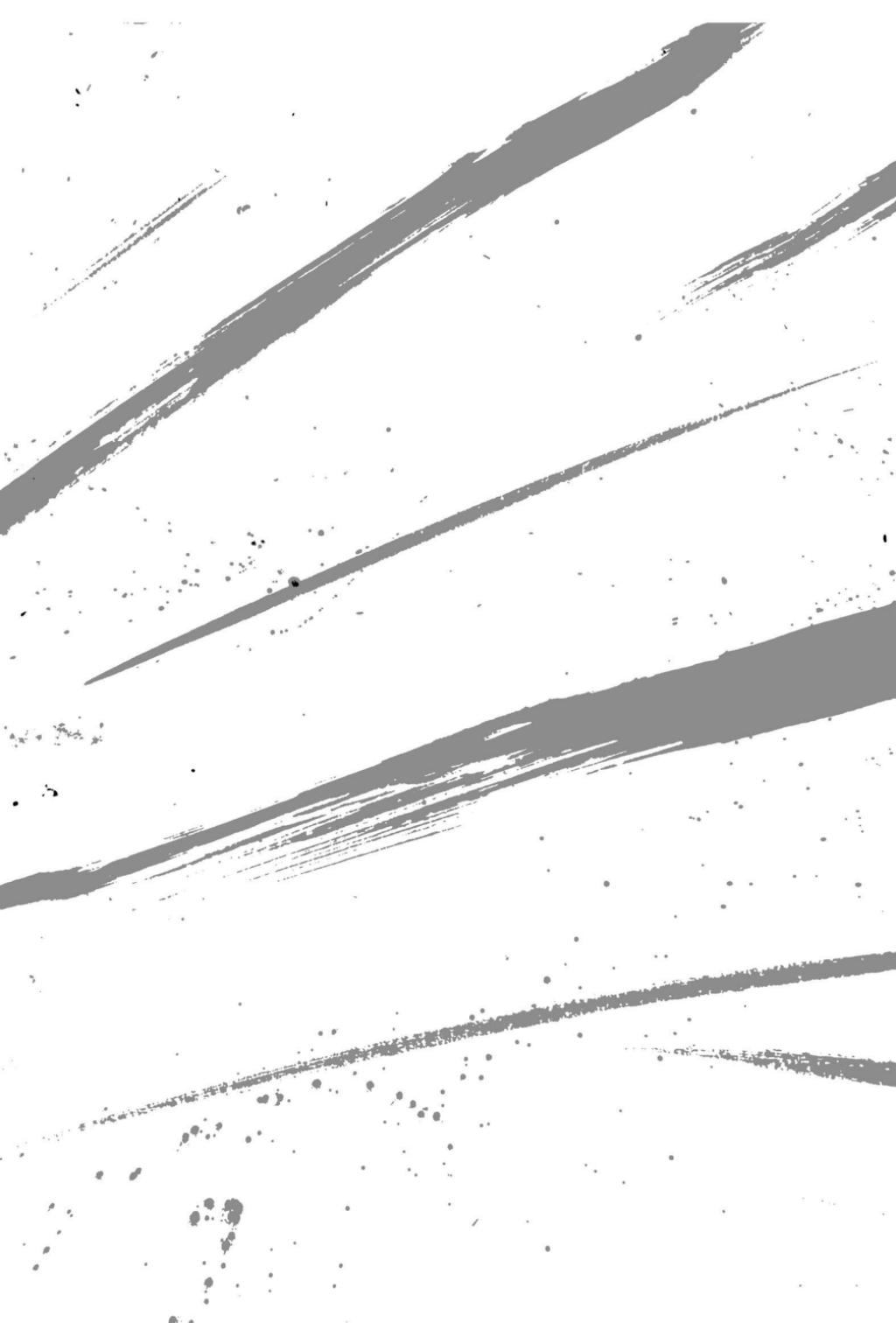
Now...





...HAVE A LOOK
AT THIS...











Merciful Creator!!

I don't know how
much was real and how
much was **Severish**
fancy. It doesn't seem
to me that earth can
hold a dream like that!



Damn it all, it
wasn't even the
fiendish subject
that made it such
an immortal
fountainhead of
all panic...

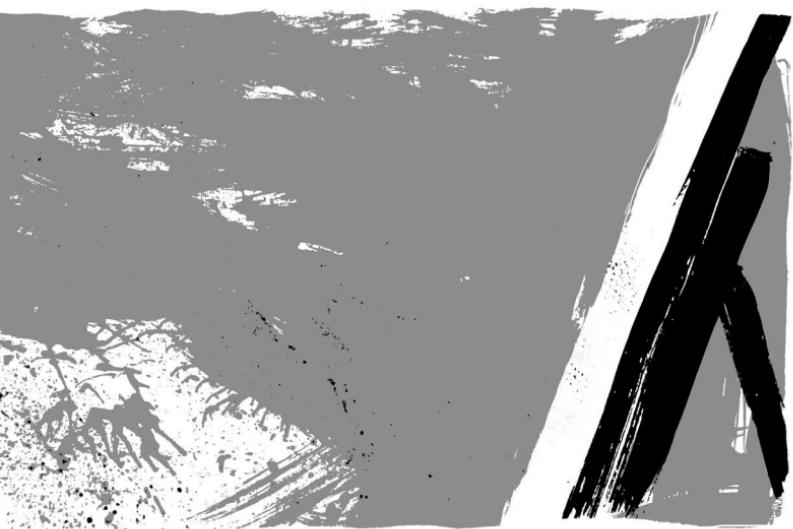
It was the
technique,
Eliot...

...the cursed
unnatural
technique!

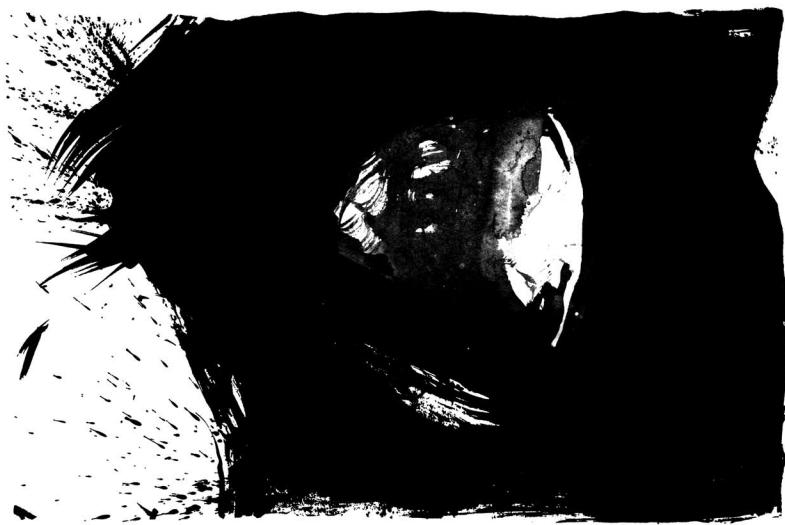


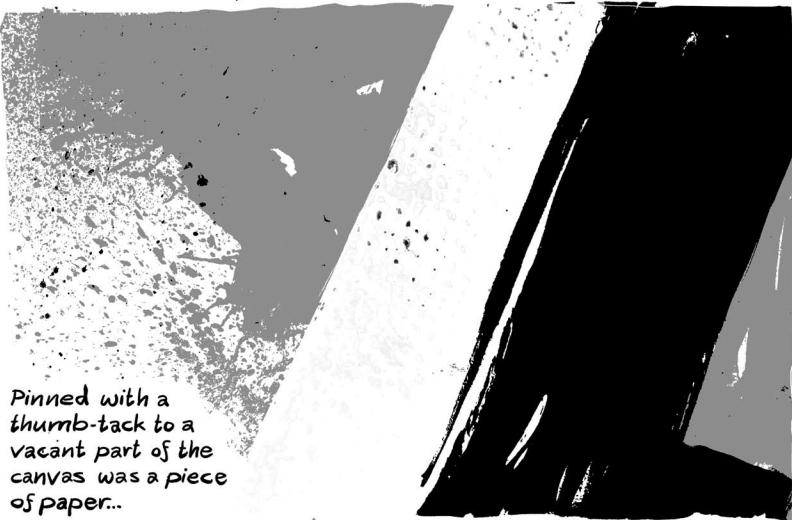
As I am a
living being,
I never
elsewhere saw
the actual breath
of life so fused into
a canvas.





...and I knew that only
a suspension of Nature's laws
could ever let a man paint a thing
like that without a model.





Pinned with a
thumb-tack to a
vacant part of the
canvas was a piece
of paper...



...probably a
photograph from
which Pickman meant
to paint a background
as hideous as the
nightmare it was to
enhance.

Pickman had been listening with peculiar intensity ever since my shocked scream had waked unaccustomed echoes in the dark cellar...



...suddenly I saw him start as if shot.



He seemed struck with a fright which, though not comparable to my own, had in it more of the physical than of the spiritual.









*He closed the
door behind him.*

I fancied I heard a faint
scurrying sound somewhere,
and a series of squeals
or beats in a direction
I couldn't determine.

I thought of
huge rats and shuddered.

Then there came a subdued
sort of clatter which somehow
set me all in gooseflesh...

...a surtive, groping kind
of clatter though I can't
attempt to convey what
I mean in words.

*It was like
heavy wood falling on
stone or brick...*

...wood on brick...

*...what did
that make me think of?*

It came again...

...and louder.

*There was a vibration
as if the wood had fallen
farther than it had fallen
before.*

After that followed a sharp
grating noise, a shouted
gibberish from Pickman...

..the deafening
discharge of all six
chambers of a
revolver...



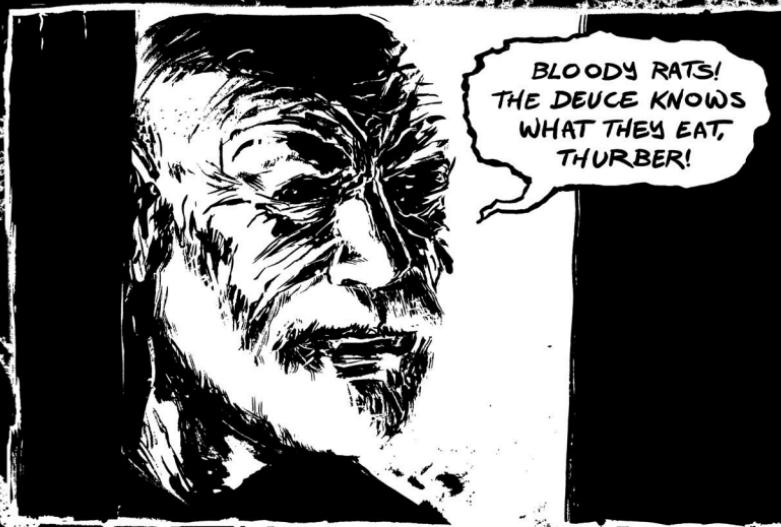


...fired spectacularly as a
lion tamer might fire in
the air for effect.

A muffled squeal or
squawk, and a thud.

Then more wood and
brick grating...

...a pause...









You know the
curled-up paper
tacked to the **frightful**
canvas in the cellar...



...the thing I thought
was a photograph of
some **scene** he meant
to use as a **background**
for that monster.

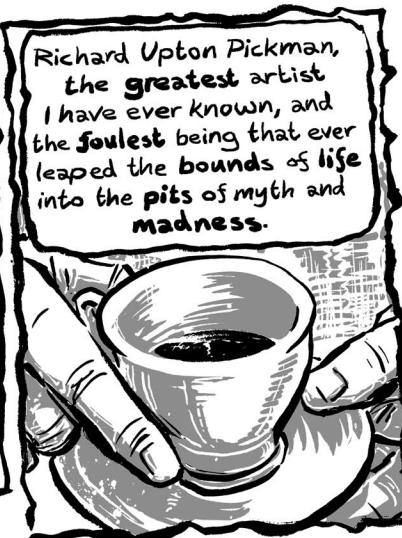
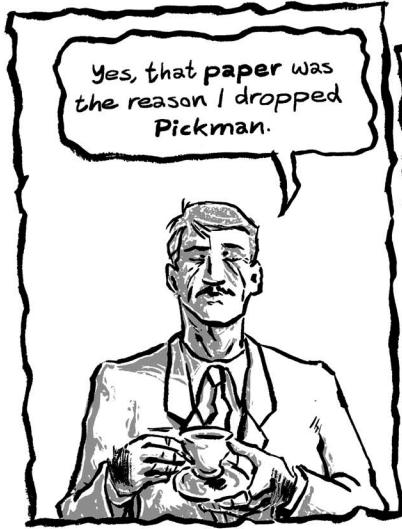


It seems I had
vacantly crumpled it
into my pocket.



But here's
the coffee...







Well, that paper wasn't a photograph of any background, after all. What it showed was simply the monstrous being he was painting on that awful canvas.

It was the model he was using... and its background was merely the wall of the cellar studio in minute detail.

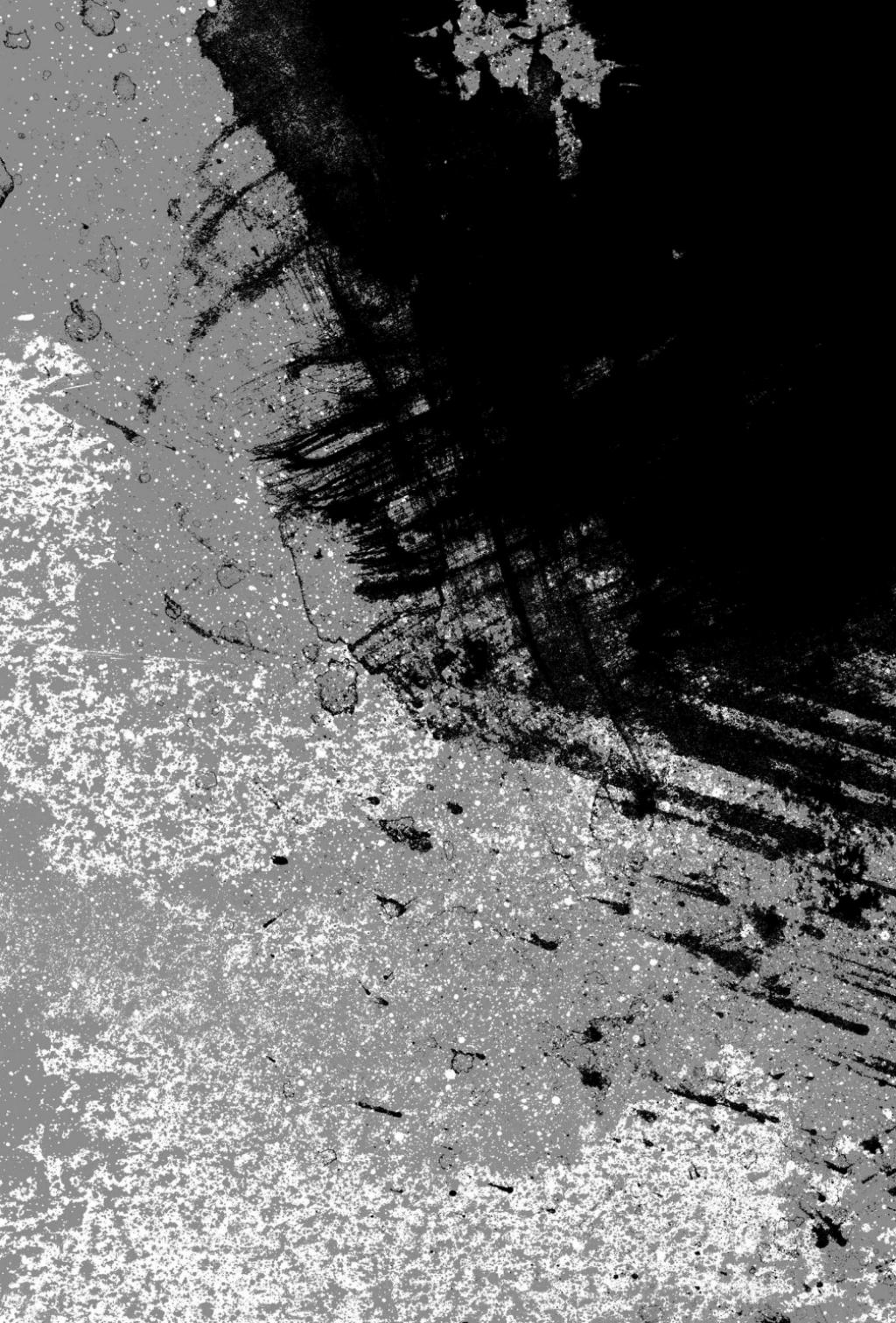


But
by God,
Eliot...



...IT WAS A
PHOTOGRAPH
FROM LIFE!





Original text written by:
Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937)

Adapted, edited, and illustrated by:
Kim Holm

Cover image and design by:
Robert Høyem
Model for Richard Upton Pickman:
Peter Strand
Original photo references by:
Erling Eide Thorsrud

Photo references for Boston and the North End from:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/boston_public_library/

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